



Liberia

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Liberia is a centralized republic dominated by a strong presidency. The Constitution provides for three branches of government, but there was no effective system of checks and balances, and presidents traditionally have wielded extraordinary power. Charles G. Taylor, who is of both indigenous and Americo-Liberian ancestry, has led the Government since 1996, when forces under his command emerged dominant after a 7-year civil war. President Taylor used intimidation, patronage, and corruption to maintain power. In 1997 Taylor won the presidential election, and his National Patriotic Party (NPP) won three-quarters of the seats in the legislature. The elections were administratively free and transparent, but were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, because most voters believed that Taylor's forces would have resumed fighting if he had lost. Other leaders of the former warring factions subsequently left the country. From February 8 until September 14, the Government operated under a state of emergency that suspended some civil liberties such as peaceful assembly in response to the armed insurgency of a rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). The Government used the provisions of the state of emergency to stop all support for rebel goals, real or imagined. The bicameral legislature exercised little independence from the executive branch. The judiciary was subject to political influence, economic pressure, and corruption.

The regular security forces include: The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL); the Liberia National Police (LNP), which has primary responsibility for internal security; the Antiterrorist Unit (ATU), composed of an elite special forces group consisting predominately of foreign nationals from Burkina Faso and The Gambia, as well as former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) combatants from Sierra Leone; and the Special Security Service (SSS), a large, heavily armed executive protective force. The ATU absorbed Taylor's most experienced civil war fighters, including undisciplined and untrained loyalists. There also were numerous irregular security services attached to certain key ministries and parastatal corporations, the responsibilities of which appeared to be defined poorly. National Police Director Paul Mulbah headed the police force; however, former National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) officials within the police service wielded considerable power. The national army, which fought against Taylor's faction during the civil war, has yet to be downsized and restructured as required by the 1996 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)-brokered Abuja Peace Accords. Several thousand troops deployed in northern counties were fighting armed dissidents; however, there were few troops deployed to maintain security in other rural areas of the country. Fighting between the security forces and the LURD rebels intensified and spread towards Monrovia during the first half of the year; however, government forces regained lost territory by the year's end. The Government offered a general amnesty to LURD fighters that several dozen accepted. Security forces frequently acted independently of government authority, particularly in rural areas. Members of the security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses.

Liberia, with a population of approximately 3.1 million (UNDP estimate), was a very poor country with a market-based economy that has yet to recover from the ravages of the civil war. Few statistics were available, but real growth probably was negative. Average per capita income was estimated at less than \$170. An estimated 80 percent of the population lives on less than \$1 per day. The country had an unemployment rate of at least 70 percent and only a 30 percent literacy rate. The internal displacement of civilians in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba Counties and the absence of infrastructure throughout the country continued to depress the economy, despite the country's rich natural resources and potential self-sufficiency in food. Government officials continued to exploit the country's natural resources for personal profit. Extortion was widespread in all levels of society.

The Government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous, serious abuses. The security forces committed many unlawful killings, and they were accused of the disappearances of numerous persons, especially ethnic Mandingos suspected of antigovernment sympathies. Security forces frequently tortured, beat, and otherwise abused or humiliated citizens. The Government investigated some of the alleged

abuses by the security forces; however, abusers rarely were charged or disciplined. Prison conditions remained harsh and sometimes life threatening. Security forces continued to use arbitrary arrest and detention, and lengthy pretrial detention remained common. The judicial system, hampered by political influence, economic pressure, inefficiency, corruption, and a lack of resources, was unable to ensure citizens' rights to due process and a fair trial. In some rural areas where the judiciary had not been reestablished, clan chieftains administered criminal justice through the traditional practice of trial-by-ordeal; authorities tacitly condoned this practice. Political prisoners held from previous years were released; however, numerous persons during the state of emergency were denied habeas corpus and held indefinitely as "illegal combatants," often without access to lawyers or international humanitarian organizations. Security forces violated citizens' privacy rights. The Government restricted freedom of speech and of the press; it detained, threatened, and intimidated journalists. The Government banned political gatherings during the state of emergency. Security forces restricted freedom of movement. Security forces frequently harassed human rights monitors. Violence and discrimination against women remained problems. The welfare of children widely remained neglected, and female genital mutilation (FGM) continued to be practiced. Societal ethnic discrimination remained widespread, ethnic differences continued to generate violence and political tensions, and the Government continued to discriminate against groups that had opposed Taylor in the civil war, especially the Mandingo and the Krahn ethnic groups. Forced labor persisted in rural areas. Child labor remained widespread, and there were reports of forced child labor. Ritualistic killings also persisted.

Rebels fighting in the northwest also committed serious human rights abuses. The absence of independent observers in rebel-controlled areas made documentation of such abuses difficult.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary and Unlawful Deprivation of Life

Security forces continued to commit extrajudicial killings. Human rights organizations estimated that such killings increased during the year as hundreds of civilians died in the fighting which occurred in Lofa and Gbarpolu Counties. Fighting between government forces and LURD insurgents spread from the border areas towards Monrovia during the first half of the year and culminated in several pitched battles for key towns; however, by October the Government reoccupied most of the country's territory. No perpetrators were arrested or convicted for any killings connected to the conflict.

There were many unlawful killings during the year. For example, on June 19, an ATU officer and presidential guards opened fire on a taxicab in Monrovia and killed a 6-year-old child and critically injured his mother and the driver. President Taylor ordered an investigation of the incident, which was ongoing at year's end.

On July 3, police shot, killed, and publicly displayed in Monrovia the body of Kennedy Kessely, thought to be an armed robber. There was no investigation, and no action was taken against the responsible members of the police.

In September Lt. Issac Gono, a driver attached to ATU chief Charles Taylor Jr.'s command, was beaten to death by his colleagues as a disciplinary measure for denting a vehicle. Two soldiers were arrested and held for court martial. The trial was opened; however, it later was suspended for unknown reasons, and the case was pending at year's end.

On September 22, Special Operations Division (SOD) policemen killed John B. Toe after he allegedly had been involved in an armed robbery. There were no reports of an investigation, and none of the responsible members of the security forces were disciplined or charged by year's end.

There were no developments in the July 2001 case of three SOD officers arrested and detained for killing an immigration officer in Bong County; the July 2001 case of the commander of the Kakata town police and another man arrested and detained for murder and armed robbery; and the August 2001 case of the killing by unknown persons of the Chief Financial Officer of the Police Training Academy outside of Monrovia.

Former Deputy Minister of Labor Bedell Fahn and four members of the ATU arrested for torturing two Nigerian men to death in October 2001 were tried during the year. Fahn was sentenced to 10 months in prison; however, in September he was released. Two ATU members were acquitted and the other two were sentenced to life imprisonment.

The police commander of Gbarnga who shot and killed a fourth grade boy in December 2001 was dismissed from the police force. He remained in detention pending trial at year's end.

In October the Catholic Church established a four-person commission to investigate the five American nuns who allegedly were killed by NPFL rebels in 1992 in Monrovia.

No action was known to have been taken, or is any likely to be, against the police officers responsible for the killing of Nyanqui Luoh in 2000.

In March unknown persons killed Henry Cooper, chairman of the Unity Party Bong County Branch under unexplained circumstances. No one was arrested for the crime by year's end; however, residents believed the killing was politically motivated.

There continued to be reports that rival security personnel clashed violently during the year. For example, in June four persons were killed during a fight between AFL soldiers and progovernment militia in Sanoyea, Bong County.

As fighting with the LURD rebels spread and moved south, there were credible reports that government forces, especially the ATU, as well as members of the Lorma ethnic group continued to harass, intimidate, detain, and kill members of the Mandingo ethnic group and other suspected LURD sympathizers (see Section 1.d.). During the year, uncontrolled government security forces killed large numbers of civilians who were suspected of being rebel sympathizers by shooting them, burning them alive, or cutting their throats; some soldiers killed civilians while looting their villages. Human rights monitors reported that abuses included torture and rape (see Section 1.c.). Minister of Information Reginald Goodridge denied that security forces committed abuses.

In September several attacks on villages and customs posts along the Guinea border resulted in approximately a dozen deaths. It was not clear whether the perpetrators were government forces, Guinean villagers, Guinean rebels, or LURD rebels.

Rebel forces fighting the Government in the northwest killed, tortured, and raped civilians. For example, on June 17, LURD rebels opened fire on civilians at a market in the town of Gbah and killed at least four persons. LURD rebels also commandeered food, shelter, and persons for forced labor.

On June 20, LURD rebels attacked Sinje, the site of a refugee camp on the border of Sierra Leone, and killed one civilian and two government soldiers; government soldiers killed one LURD rebel during the attack (see Section 2.d.).

There were no reported developments in the 2000 case of 12 men arrested for the burning of a mosque and other buildings and the death of 4 persons in a property dispute in Nimba County; the 12 men reportedly remained in detention pending a trial at year's end.

There were no further developments in the 2000 attacks reportedly in northeastern Nimba that resulted in numerous deaths.

There were no developments in the January 2001 attack by a Guinean helicopter gunship on Solumba that killed at least 10 persons.

Incidents of ritualistic killings, in which human body parts used in traditional rituals were removed from the victim, continued to be reported (see Section 2.c.). There were no reported developments, nor were any likely, in the 2000 case of two suspects charged with killing and mutilating a 10-year-old girl.

b. Disappearance

Security forces were responsible for numerous disappearances. For example, in May security forces allegedly abducted several ethnic Mandingos during a LURD rebel attack near Monrovia. The Mandingos remained missing at year's end.

There was no resolution or further information about the May 2001 case of 24 persons taken into custody by the ATU and transported to Gbatala military base in Bong County. The whereabouts of seven refugees who were arrested upon their return from Guinea in 2000 remained unknown.

During the year, rebels were responsible for abductions. For example, LURD rebels abducted 60 blind refugees,

along with a British priest. In July all of the refugees were released; however, one elderly man was killed during fighting in June.

In June LURD rebels abducted five nurses from a refugee camp; in September they were released (see Section 2.d.).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices; however, government police and security forces frequently tortured, beat, and otherwise abused and humiliated citizens. Detainees continued to charge that they were tortured while in detention, especially at a security-training base in Gbatata. Victims and witnesses reported beatings, torture, killings, and sexual abuse at the base. Despite calls by human rights organizations for the closure of the base, the base remained opened at year's end. The Government also resisted efforts by human rights monitors to visit the detention facilities at Gbatata. The use of torture reportedly was widespread in interrogating LURD captives in conflict zones.

On April 24, lawyer and critic of the Government, Tiawan Gongole, was arrested under the terms of the state of emergency after the independent newspaper *The Analyst* published a speech in which Gongole exhorted civil society to work for peace and criticized the Liberian Marketing Association for being a "cheerleader" for the Government. Police stripped naked and severely beat Gongole while he was in detention at the Central Police Station; he had to be hospitalized after his release. His request for habeas corpus was denied repeatedly, past the 48 hour constitutional limit. On May 6, the Government dropped the case against Gongole. Members of the security forces, David Moore and James Kollie, were charged with assault in the case of Gongole, and their trial was pending at year's end.

In July Dixon Gbalh, the director of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Liberia Prisons Watch, was arrested and beaten for allegedly spreading false information. He fled from the country after his release.

Law enforcement personnel, including the security forces, were implicated in numerous reports of harassment, intimidation, and looting (see Section 1.f.). For example, on March 10, six armed AFL soldiers harassed and robbed civilians at an agricultural project in Clean Town, Bomi County. The soldiers also captured the project's Agricultural Manager, John Nizan, whom they forced into 3 weeks of menial labor. Nizan escaped when LURD dissidents attacked the town. Clean Town subsequently vacated and its residents became internally displaced persons (IDPs).

On several occasions, government security personnel harassed, assaulted, and arrested journalists (see Section 2.a.).

Security forces targeted and abused critics of the Government, including students and human rights activists (see Sections 1.d. and 1.f.).

There were credible reports that government forces as well as members of the Lorma ethnic group continued to harass, intimidate, detain, and, on occasion, kill members of the Mandingo ethnic group in Lofa County (see Sections 1.a. and 1.d.).

There was no action taken against the responsible members of the security forces who fired on vehicles at roadblocks in May and June 2001, or in the August 2001 beating of Congresswoman Ellen King and Senator Armah Jalluh.

The six officials who in October 2001 tortured to death two Nigerian men accused of theft were tried and convicted of the killings (see Section 1.a.).

There was no known action taken, nor is any likely to be taken, against the members of the security forces responsible for shooting, harassing, injuring, assaulting, or otherwise abusing persons in the following cases from 2000: The February assault on a foreign diplomat; the February shooting of an LNP officer; the March beating of a local embassy security guard; and the June assault on a local embassy employee.

Despite official demands to improve training in 2001, the behavior of ATU personnel at checkpoints did not improve substantially during the year. There were many credible reports that security forces harassed returning refugees and displaced persons, especially in border areas. No police officers responsible for abuses were disciplined

during the year.

In August President Taylor announced that government soldiers convicted of rape on the war front would be executed; however, there were no reports this punishment was carried out. The SSS and the Forces Operation Division also committed rapes.

In December 2001, soldiers reportedly attacked the northern town of Kolahun and gang-raped six women and girls, one of whom was 12 years old.

A panel appointed by University of Liberia (UL) officials completed an investigation into the March 2001 beatings of students by police when they forcibly dispersed a student demonstration. The panel suspended or expelled several students for their part in the confrontation; however, the panel recommended no actions against members of the security forces.

Violent clashes among rival security personnel at times resulted in civilian injuries (see Section 1.a.). For example, in September security forces shot and injured civilians during a battle over control of expropriated fuel near the port of Monrovia.

Clan chieftains continued to use the traditional practice of trial-by-ordeal to resolve criminal cases in rural areas. The Supreme Court ruled that trial-by-ordeal--commonly the placement of a heated metal object on a suspect's body in an attempt to determine whether the defendant is telling the truth--is unconstitutional; however, the practice continued under an executive order. A domestic human rights group urged that trial-by-ordeal be abolished throughout the country; however, no action was taken by year's end.

Prison conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. There were credible reports of unofficial detention facilities, including one at the Executive Mansion, in which detainees were held without charge and in some cases tortured. The Government did not provide detainees or prisoners with adequate food or medical care. The National Human Rights Center reported on the "de-humanizing and deplorable conditions" detainees experienced at the Central Police Station. The Center reported that detainees sometimes were fed only a spoonful of rice per day and that police permitted prisoners to torture, humiliate, and flog detainees. Cells at Monrovia Central Prison were overcrowded, mostly with detainees awaiting trial. Only approximately 10 percent of the total prison population was convicted of criminal offenses. Similar conditions existed in the Barclay Training Center military stockade. In some counties, the structure that serves as a jail is a container with bars at one end. There also were reports that local officials forced prisoners to work for them.

Women, who constituted approximately 5 percent of the prison population, were held in separate cells. Their conditions were comparable to those of the male prisoners and detainees. There were no separate facilities for juvenile offenders. Women and particularly juveniles were subject to abuse by guards or other inmates. Convicted prisoners and detainees awaiting trial were not held in separate facilities.

In September Minister of Justice Leveli Korbo Johnson identified 141 persons held in prisons, many for offenses that did not merit incarceration, and ordered them released. In a number of cases, human rights groups and interested persons obtained the release of detainees and prisoners; however, for the most part, these cases tended to be nonpolitical in nature.

The Government generally permitted the independent monitoring of prison conditions by local human rights groups, the media, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Although visits to unofficial detention centers often were denied, in June 2001, the Government allowed members of the U.N. Security Council Expert Panel on Liberia to visit Gbatala base, where victims have been detained and tortured. The Panel did not include any findings from Gbatala in its report. The ICRC often was allowed to visit persons held in prison facilities and police detention centers without third parties present and to make regular repeat visits; however, despite repeated requests the ICRC was not granted access to Gbatala Camp.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, security forces continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily. In September Justice Minister Koboi Johnson reported 141 persons unlawfully detained in prisons. Persons were abused and sometimes tortured while in detention (see Section 1.c.).

The Constitution provides for the rights of the accused, including warrants for arrests and the right of detainees

either to be charged or released within 48 hours. Although the Government generally adhered to these standards, warrants were not always based on sufficient evidence, and detainees, especially those without the means to hire a lawyer, often were held for more than 48 hours without charge. The Constitution provides for the right of a person who is charged to receive an expeditious trial; however, lengthy pretrial and prearrest detention remained serious problems. In some cases, the length of the pretrial detention equaled or exceeded the length of sentence for the crime.

Security forces at times refused to produce suspects being held in detention without charge even after the courts issued writs of habeas corpus on the application of human rights organizations. Their disappearances often were the result of prolonged illegal detention at the Gbatata base (see Section 1.c.). In some cases, persons were detained secretly at unofficial detention centers, including one at the Executive Mansion (see Section 1.c.). In April as a result of the efforts of the NGO National Human Rights Center to file writs of habeas corpus on their behalf, the Government released 24 persons--some were detained as long as 4 years without charge.

In April police released 24 detainees who had been held without charge since February, when they were arrested during security sweeps against suspected "dissident collaborators."

On June 24, security officials detained and held incommunicado Hassan Bility, the editor-in-chief of *The Analyst*, Abubakar Kamara, Mohamed Kamara, and Asumana Kamara reportedly on suspicion of links to LURD rebels. Although a civil court judge approved a writ of habeas corpus for the four individuals, it was refused by the Government and overturned by a higher court. The Government alleged that the four detainees were not civil prisoners entitled to constitutional rights, but rather "illegal combatants." The Military Court Martial Board filed a second writ of habeas corpus, requesting that Bility and the others appear before a military court by August 7; however, the Ministry of National Defense declared the writ void, arguing that it had been filed "improperly." Bility routinely was beaten in prison, sometimes severely, and often held in poor locations, including confinement for several weeks in an underground pit. He was denied access to lawyers, family, and other outside visitors. The other detainees were held at an undisclosed location without access to lawyers, family, or the Red Cross. Family members, who often bribed prison officers to communicate with the detainees, alleged the detainees were abused badly by their captors. On December 7, Bility was released and left the country.

On July 25, Sheikh K.M. Sackor also was detained as an "illegal combatant." A writ of habeas corpus in favor of Sheikh Sackor was refused on the same grounds, citing the Bility case as precedent. Sackor remained incarcerated and denied all outside contact at year's end. By year's end, an unknown number of persons were detained during the state of emergency as "illegal combatants," frequently without access to lawyers or international humanitarian organizations, and denied habeas corpus.

In July and August, in connection with the Bility case, ATU forces seized and arrested alleged LURD conspirators, most of them ethnic Mandingos; they remained detained at unknown locations at year's end (see Section 1.b.). Many ethnic Mangingos subsequently fled to neighboring countries, primarily Guinea.

On September 14, Manasuah Kollison, a law student at UL, was arrested and detained at National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) headquarters without charge. The NBI did not respond to a writ of habeas corpus filed on his behalf. The whereabouts of Kollison was unknown at year's end.

Security forces arrested and detained a number of journalists, NGO members, and human rights activists during the year (see Sections 2.a., 2.c., and 4).

Government security forces and the LURD detained, tortured, and killed hundreds of civilians during the year (see Sections 1.a. and 1.c.).

The police only have limited logistics and forensic capabilities and cannot adequately investigate many crimes, including murder cases. When the courts released known criminals for lack of evidence, police officers often arrested them again on false charges.

On March 19, the Government released senior Ministry of Defense intelligence officer Colonel Aloysius Zayzay, who had been arrested in 2000 on treason charges. Auditor General Raleigh Seekie, also arrested in 2000 on treason charges, was released in December 2001.

The Government did not use forced exile; however, as a result of frequent harassment and threats by the security forces, a number of student activists, opposition figures, and human rights activists fled the country due to fear for their personal safety or that of their families. For example, Minister of Transportation Francis Carboh resigned his

post from overseas and stayed in self-imposed exile. In August Mohamed Konneh, President of the Muslim Students Association at UL, feared for his life and fled to another country in the region. Journalist Hassan Bility left the country. Former Deputy Minister of Information and Presidential Media Advisor J. Milton Teahjay; leader of the UL Student Union Alphonse Nimene; prominent NGO Director Conmany Wesseh; former president of the interim national government in the 1990s Amos Sawyer; human rights activist James Torh; and Muslim organization leader Lartin Konneh all remained outside the country at year's end.

The existence of the state of emergency deterred many opposition figures who resided abroad from returning to the country. In May Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson, runner-up in the 1997 presidential polls, spent several days in Monrovia. Although invited back in August for the government-sponsored Reconciliation Conference, she and other overseas citizens declined to attend, citing personal safety concerns.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, judges were subjected to political, social, familial, and financial pressures, and the judiciary was corrupt. Some judges and magistrates were not lawyers. The judiciary has determined that it was not feasible to retire all judicial personnel who were not legally trained but intended to replace those currently sitting with lawyers as they retire. By statute members of the bar must be graduates of a law school and pass the bar examination. The executive branch continued to exert strong influence on the judiciary. For example, the Government's assertion that persons identified as "illegal combatants" have no recourse to the civil courts appeared to have no basis in law; however, writs of habeas corpus for Bility and Sackor were refused on such grounds (see Section 1.d.).

The judiciary is divided into four levels, with the Supreme Court at the apex. All levels of the court system in Monrovia, including the Supreme Court, functioned sporadically. The Government's efforts to revitalize the court system outside of Monrovia continued to be hindered by a lack of trained personnel, a lack of infrastructure, and inadequate funding. Although judges were assigned throughout the country, in some cases they were unable to hold court due to lack of supplies and equipment. Traditional forms of justice administered by clan chieftains remained prevalent in some localities (see Section 1.c.).

Under the Constitution, defendants have due process rights; however, in practice these rights were not always observed. Defendants have the right to a public trial and timely consultation with an attorney; however, there was no effective system to provide public defenders, especially in rural areas. Some NGOs provided legal services to indigents and others who have no representation.

Courts regularly received bribes or other illegal gifts out of damages that they awarded in civil cases. Defense attorneys often suggested that their clients pay a gratuity to appease judges, prosecutors, and police officers to secure favorable rulings. In 2000 the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court stated publicly that delays in salary payments to judicial personnel contributed to corruption in the judiciary.

There continued to be long delays in deciding cases involving juveniles. On March 12, President Taylor granted executive clemency to 24 ethnic Krahn political prisoners, including Armah Youlou, Professor Charles Breeze, Brigadier Joseph Jarlee, and Major Alphonso Dubar, who were released on the same day. The group included civilian prisoners convicted of treason and military officers convicted of sedition. All were detained following the 1998 fighting in Monrovia.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution provides for the right of privacy and the sanctity of the home; however, authorities regularly infringed on these rights. The Constitution provides that the police must obtain a warrant, or have a reasonable belief that a crime is in progress, or is about to be committed, before entering a private dwelling. In practice police and paramilitary officers frequently entered private homes and churches without warrants to carry out arrests and investigations. Police also raided the offices of newspapers and NGOs during the year, including The Analyst newspaper and the human rights group Liberia Prison Watch (see Sections 2.a. and 4).

The security forces harassed and threatened opposition figures and their families by conducting illegal surveillance. In some cases, they entered the homes of opposition figures. For example, on July 18, just prior to the start of the National Reconciliation Conference, the ATU searched the homes of opposition leaders Dr. Togba-Nah Tipoteh and former telecommunications minister Roosevelt Jayjay. Several student leaders remained under surveillance at year's end.

Some journalists and human rights activists resided in the homes of friends or relatives at times due to fear that the security forces might follow through with their threats against them. Incidents of harassment and threats increased with the continuing violence in the northwest.

In April police used so-called security sweeps to search for dissidents in the Paynesville area after LURD rebels allegedly distributed leaflets there, and several persons abandoned their homes and moved in with relatives.

In rural areas, particularly in remote parts of Lofa and Gbarpolu Counties, armed security forces illegally entered homes, most often to steal food, money, or other property. Members of the security forces in rural areas generally were paid and provisioned inadequately and often extorted money and goods from citizens. Local communities were compelled to provide food, shelter, and labor for members of the security forces stationed in their villages. Human Rights Watch reported that President Taylor's security services, the SSS and the SOD, both mobilized to combat LURD rebels, consisted of former NPFL rebels who were paid a one-time fee of \$150 (8,200 Id) and were expected to loot and pillage thereafter to support themselves.

On October 29, SOD police raided the home of human rights activist Aloysius Toe after Toe announced a week of solidarity for Hassan Bility and other detainees (see Section 4). Government officials said that e-mail documents were found in Toe's home that linked him with LURD rebels.

ATU members increasingly were involved in criminal activities such as theft, looting, and murder in Monrovia. More than in the past, the perpetrators were apprehended; however, cases against them remained unresolved at year's end. Two ATU members arrested in November 2001 after looting a private residence in Monrovia were released during the year.

Some persons believed that government security personnel monitored e-mail (see Section 2.a.).

There were reports that security forces and rebels forcibly conscripted men and boys to fight in the conflict in Lofa County (see Section 5).

The Government continued the occasional practice of arresting family members in order to persuade a suspect to turn himself in. For example, on October 29, armed police officers entered the house of human rights activist Aloysius Toe and abducted his wife, Vivian Toe. She was released after she contacted her husband and asked him to turn himself in for questioning.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the Government restricted these rights in practice, particularly during the months when the state of emergency was in force. Security agents threatened, detained, and assaulted journalists and intimidated many journalists into practicing self-censorship. Cabinet ministers periodically objected to critical articles and forced stories to be dropped or modified.

The Government arrested critics of the state of emergency in February, such as Councilor Morris (see Sections 1.d. and 4). In March New Deal Movement Chairman Nigba Wiaplah was harassed and arrested on charges of "inciting insurrection" for saying that conflict in the northwest arose from the Government's refusal to restructure the security forces. On April 2, Wiaplah filed a writ of habeas corpus and was released on bail; his trial was pending at year's end.

In Monrovia there were eight newspapers that published during the year; however, some published irregularly. Two were independent dailies and five usually appeared at least once a week. Their political orientation ranged between progovernment and critical of the Government. The Public Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism published one newspaper, and the communications network owned by the President published a weekly newspaper. The ruling party also published a newspaper.

With some notable exceptions, government officials reluctantly tolerated the press; however, they frequently criticized the media publicly for what they considered negative reporting. The Government's media advisory committee created in 2001 to reduce tensions between the Government and the press had little noticeable effect. Requirements for foreign journalists, including a minimum 72-hour advance notice of the intent to enter the country and a 24-hour waiting period for accreditation after arrival remained in force. The government order that required

local journalists to clear reporting on the insurgency prior to publication, generally was obeyed out of fear of government retribution.

Reporting that criticized the Government brought threats of violence, closure, or directives from powerful government officials to advertisers that they should discontinue business with that media outlet.

Newspaper availability fluctuated during the year. Management of the one printing facility capable of producing newspapers was subject to pressure from the Government. To meet the costs of production, the typical newspaper's eight pages included two or three pages of advertisements or paid announcements. Some articles were the result of gifts or money that supplemented reporters' meager salaries. The Press Union of Liberia, an independent association of journalists, secured a license to begin independent press operations, but internal problems prevented the actual start of operations.

In general journalists were outspoken and even provocative. In September the press printed stories alleging that the son of the President, Charles Taylor Jr., was involved in the death of his driver (see Section 1.a.). However, journalists also practiced self-censorship, especially in regard to information about the President and his immediate family members.

In March Jerome Dalieh and Bill Jarkloh, editor and news editor, respectively, of The News newspaper were detained in connection with a story that Police Director Mulbah deemed to be "anti-reconciliation." The two were released the same day.

In May the ATU detained Emmanuel Mondaye, a reporter of The Inquirer newspaper, for allegedly spying for a foreign embassy in the Gbarnga area. Mondaye was released after 4 days.

On April 26, the Government harassed and shut down The Analyst newspaper following its publication of a speech by human rights attorney Tiawan Gongole (see Section 1.c.). On June 5, The Analyst resumed publication. In June the editor-in-chief of The Analyst, Hassan Bility, who the Government had harassed for years, was arrested and accused of harboring LURD sympathies (see Section 1.d.). The Press Union of Liberia issued several well-publicized calls that demanded Bility be released or publicly charged and tried. Amnesty International (AI) conducted a global letter writing campaign on his behalf during the year.

On December 14, five armed ATU members severely beat Throble Suah, a journalist for the independent newspaper, The Inquirer. After being hospitalized for more 3 weeks, Suah was flown out of the country to receive better medical attention.

Security personnel sometimes interpreted criticism as a license to harass, threaten, arrest, and even assault targeted persons; the Government often required arrested journalists to apologize in writing prior to releasing them.

Due to the high price of newspapers, the high rate of illiteracy (estimated at 75 percent), high transportation costs, and the poor state of roads elsewhere in the country, newspaper distribution generally was limited to the Monrovia area. As a result, radio was the primary means of mass communication. There were several FM stations in Monrovia: Two private commercial stations (DC-101); and Radio Veritas, which operated under the Catholic Archdiocese. There also was the state-run national station (ELBC), a FM station operated by President Taylor's private Liberia Communications Network (LCN). ELBC, and Radio Veritas also broadcast on short-wave frequencies strong enough to reach all parts of the country. In 2001 President Taylor closed the short wave frequency of Radio Veritas, citing "illegal operation." In February the Government restored the station's short-wave license, and in April Radio Veritas resumed short-wave broadcasting. There was a French broadcast through the national radio facility, a religious station (with limited short-wave capacity), and a growing number of small local stations in cities around the country. Media practitioners believed that the ruling party funded many of these stations.

Call-in radio talk shows were popular and frequently a forum for both government and opposition viewpoints. The number of objections and threats from the Government, party leaders, and security agents aimed at radio hosts and station managers regarding inappropriate commentary diminished to some extent. Interviews with prominent persons were broadcast frequently.

Due to the economic situation in the country and the dependence on generators requiring expensive fuel, most stations limited broadcast hours and in some cases ceased operation for short periods.

Television was limited to those who could purchase sets, the generators, and fuel to provide electricity. For those persons and businesses with satellite capability, the CNN was available. There were two television stations: The LCN, owned by President Taylor, and the Ducor Broadcasting Corporation, which was privately owned but assisted by President Taylor's generator.

Several Internet cafes operated in Monrovia, although access was limited by relatively high fees. The Government continued to charge that opponents used the Internet to wage a propaganda war. However, the Ministry of Information also maintained an unofficial website--allaboutliberia.com--that promoted a progovernment view of the country. Two Internet Service Providers (ISPs) operated in Monrovia and both were linked to prominent persons. Some people believed that government security personnel monitored the Internet, especially e-mail.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom. Unlike in the previous year, there were no violent demonstrations that resulted in suspensions and expulsions; however, UL did not open for the fall session. Alphonse Nimene, president of the Student Union, 15 student leaders, and numerous other students remained in self-imposed exile at year's end.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly; however, on April 26, Minister of Justice Eddington Varmah announced that all "public gatherings" were banned without prior approval of the Ministry. Requests for exemptions were denied. President Taylor defended the ban by arguing that dissidents might use mass rallies to incite insurrection. The annual May parade by journalists to commemorate World Press Freedom Day was not allowed; however, indoor sessions marking the occasion did take place. On September 14, President Taylor lifted the ban on political gatherings.

While announcing the state of emergency in February, President Taylor warned that antigovernment views would not be tolerated during the crisis.

On October 2, police forcibly dispersed high school students demonstrating before the Ministry of Education in support of striking teachers (see Section 6.b.). Dozens of students were flogged and beaten in the confrontation and were taken to police headquarters; however, they were released later that same day.

The Constitution provides for the right of association, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There were 18 political parties registered by year's end. On July 23, the Election Commission certified the New Democratic Alternative for Liberia (New Deal Movement) as a fully registered political party, which operated freely during the year. Dozens of civil society organizations, organized around themes such as human rights, women's issues, development objectives, poverty alleviation, health concerns, and worker's associations were active.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were some exceptions.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register their articles of incorporation with the Government, along with a statement of the purpose of the organization; however, traditional indigenous religious groups were not required to register, and generally did not register. Registration was routine, and there have been no reports that the registration process was burdensome or discriminatory in its administration.

On December 28, security forces arrested David Kaizolu and Christopher Toe, the Secretary General and Assistant Secretary-General respectively, of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRC). The IRC is a well-known organization that has tried to coordinate peace efforts between the LURD and the Government. They faced treason charges as LURD collaborators for possessing e-mails written by LURD leaders. After 2 weeks in prison, both were released.

The law prohibits religious discrimination; however, Islamic leaders complained of discrimination against Muslims. Although there were some Muslims in senior government positions, many Muslims believed that they were bypassed for desirable jobs because of their religion. Many Muslim business proprietors believed that the Government's decision to enforce an old statute prohibiting business on Sunday discriminated against them.

Lartin Konneh, a Muslim activist who fled the country in 2000, remained outside the country at year's end.

Some tensions existed between the major religious communities. The private sector in urban areas, particularly in the capital, gave preference to Christianity in civic ceremonies and observances, and discrimination against followers of other organized religions affected areas of individual opportunity and employment. There was an interfaith council that brought together leaders of the Christian and Islamic faiths.

Tensions continued in Lofa County between the predominantly Muslim Mandingo ethnic group and the Lorma ethnic group. There was no further action regarding the investigation into the burning of five mosques in Lofa County in 2000.

Little reliable information was readily available about traditions associated with ritual killings. Ritual killings, in which body parts used in traditional indigenous rituals were removed from the victim, continued to occur. The number of such killings was difficult to ascertain, since police often described deaths as accidents even when body parts were removed. Deaths that appeared to be natural or accidental sometimes were rumored to be the work of ritual killers. It was believed that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn ethnic groups concentrated in the southeastern counties most commonly engaged in ritual killings. The victims were usually members of the religious group performing the ritual. Body parts of a member whom the group believed to be powerful were considered to be the most effective ritually. Body parts most frequently removed include the heart, liver, and genitals. The rituals involved have been reported in some cases to entail eating body parts, and the underlying religious beliefs may be related to incidents during the civil war in which faction leaders sometimes ate (and in which one faction leader had himself filmed eating) body parts of former leaders of rival factions. Removal of body parts for use in traditional rituals is believed to be the motive for ritual killings, rather than an abuse incidental to killings committed for other motives. Ritual murders for the purpose of obtaining body parts traditionally were committed by religious group members called "heart men"; however, since the civil war, common criminals inured to killing also may sell body parts. In 2001 the Government deployed units of the ATU to Maryland County to help stem a wave of ritual killings, which reportedly reduced the incidence of ritualistic killings in the region.

For a more detailed discussion see the 2002 International Religious Freedom Report.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights; however, the Government restricted them in practice. Security forces maintained checkpoints where travelers routinely were subjected to arbitrary searches and petty extortion. Security forces were also accused of beating and robbing IDPs fleeing fighting in the northwest. Security forces also extorted money from returning refugees. From July to September units of the ATU, citing security concerns related to foreign plotting and the National Reconciliation Conference, set up roadblocks that rerouted traffic within the city and prevented visitors to a foreign embassy in Monrovia.

Unlike in the previous year, the Government did not restrict the issuance of passports or require an exit visa; however, in October passport services were suspended due to fraud concerns and subsequent investigations. Passport services remained partially suspended at year's end.

In November relief agencies estimated there were nearly 130,000 IDPs in more than a dozen camps in 5 separate counties. The number of IDPs increased by approximately 70,000 during the year due to conflicts in Lofa, Bong, Bomi, Cape Mount, and Gbarpolu Counties. International and local NGOs had limited funding and resources to assist these IDPs. The U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported from mid-year estimates that there were approximately 107,000 Liberian refugees in Guinea, 71,000 in Cote d'Ivoire, 38,000 in Sierra Leone, 11,000 in Ghana, and 3,000 in other countries.

On December 14, security forces detained 12 ethnic Krahn refugees on security grounds following their return from Cote d'Ivoire. On December 27, all were released.

AI reported that government radio announcements of impending attacks caused large-scale displacements; however, the places often were not attacked following the announcement, and security forces looted the abandoned homes (see Section 1.f.).

The law provides for the granting of asylum and refugee status in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government continued to provide first asylum to nearly 20,000 refugees, the vast majority of whom were from Sierra Leone. Approximately 55,000

refugees from Sierra Leone repatriated during the year. The Government generally cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees; however, AFL and ATU units and LURD rebels were responsible for hundreds of cases of abuse against individual refugees (see Sections 1.a., 1.b., and 1.c.). In June LURD rebels attacked the camp at Sinje and abducted five Liberian nurses. In September the nurses were released just across the Guinean border. The violence forced 11,000 to 12,000 Sierra Leoneans, 8,000 IDPs, and several thousand Sinje residents to flee. Approximately 1,500 IDPs fled across the border into Sierra Leone.

Government spokesmen said on several occasions that RUF leader Sam Bockarie left the country in 2001. Spokesmen said the Government complied with U.N. sanctions and had severed ties with the RUF; however, it was believed widely that hundreds of RUF personnel remained in the country and had become part of the security forces in the conflicted northwest of the country. There were allegations of sexual exploitation of refugee and IDP children. The U.N. office in Monrovia said that the reports of sexual exploitation largely were unsubstantiated; however, UNHCR and the humanitarian NGO community made efforts to lessen the problem. One UNHCR contracted worker was dismissed, and all other UNHCR employees were exonerated.

The whereabouts of seven returning refugees arrested in 2000 by security personnel remained unknown.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides for the right to vote in free and fair elections, and citizens exercised this right in 1997 in elections that international observers deemed administratively free and transparent; however, the elections were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, because most voters believed that military forces loyal to Charles Taylor would have resumed the civil war if Taylor lost the election. Since the legislative elections were held on the basis of proportional representation, Taylor's NPP won control of the legislature by the same 75 percent majority that he received in the popular vote for the presidency. The 1997 legislative and presidential elections were held under a special election law in accordance with the terms of the Abuja Peace Process.

On April 26, President Taylor suspended all political activity in line with the February 8 declaration of a state of emergency (see Section 2.b.). The suspension hindered party mobilization and awareness in preparation for the October 2003 elections. The ban was lifted on September 14.

The legislature did not exercise genuine independence from the executive branch. There were 16 opposition parties, most of which had little popular support outside of the capital, and opposition legislators, who held only one-quarter of the seats in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, generally were more passive than members of the ruling NPP. Congressional committees failed to develop expertise in their respective areas of responsibility. No major legislation was enacted during the year. In late September, following the death of the incumbent, the Senate elected NPP Senator Grace Minor as President Pro-Tempore of that body. She was the first woman to hold the position, which was fourth in succession to the presidency.

Constitutionally the Senate must approve presidential nominees; however, the confirmation process lagged substantially behind the appointments themselves and often appointees served months in their positions prior to confirmation. Unlike in the previous year, the executive branch did not confirm Ministers that the Senate had rejected.

The State is highly centralized. The President appoints the superintendents (governors) of the 15 counties. Municipalities and chieftaincies were supposed to elect their own officials; however, elections--postponed in 1998 due to lack of funds and disorganization--were scheduled to be held in 2003. Local governments at all levels had no independent revenue base and relied entirely on the central Government for funds. Education, health services, and public works were provided by the central Government. Local officials served mainly to lobby the central Government.

There were no restrictions on the participation of women in politics, and several women held ranking positions in the Government. There were 5 women in the 26-seat Senate and 5 women in the 64-member House of Representatives. There were 3 women ministers in the 20-member Cabinet, including the Minister for Gender and Development. A woman served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and another chaired the National Reconciliation Commission. There were no woman's caucuses; however, the ruling party has a woman's organization.

There were 2 Muslims in the 26-seat Senate, and there were 5 Muslims in the 64 -seat House of Representatives. There was one Muslim minister in the Cabinet.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases; however, members of the security forces frequently harassed NGO members and democracy and human rights activists.

Domestic human rights organizations were underfunded and understaffed, and their personnel lacked adequate training. There are three coalitions of human rights groups: The National Human Rights Center of Liberia had nine member organizations; eight other groups comprised the Network of Human Rights Chapters; and four belonged to the Federation of Human Rights Organizations. All of these organizations sought to increase public discussion of human rights problems.

Some human rights groups paid regular visits to detainees at police headquarters and prisoners at the Monrovia Central Prison (see Section 1.c.). Several domestic human rights organizations established branches outside of the capital and perform similar monitoring functions there. There was no pattern of government interference with these activities.

Members of the security forces frequently harassed members of NGOs and democracy and human rights activists. For example, in February Counselor Francis Johnson Morris, a former justice of the Supreme Court and the head of the Catholic Church's Peace and Justice Commission (JPC) was arrested and taken to Police Headquarters for objecting to the imposition of the state of emergency. She was released the same day.

In March five human rights activists--Tunny Zeogar, Peter Nicholson, John Okai, Sam Nimely, and Aloysius Toe--were detained for protesting the arrest of New Deal Movement leader Nigba Wiaplah. On June 13, the charges against four were dropped and they were released. Toe was held longer but too was released when charges against him were dropped. However, following the October arrest of his wife (see Section 1.f.), Toe turned himself in to police and was rearrested and charged with treason for having announced a week of solidarity for Hassan Bility and other detainees. Toe was detained at Monrovia's Central Prison and awaited trial at year's end.

In July two experts with the International Crisis Group were detained briefly and harassed at the airport as they were preparing to depart.

In October police arrested Blamoh Sieh, Director of the National Human Rights Center, and three staff members from the Center for the Protection of Human Rights. They were released after questioning. Following the arrests, the National Human Rights Center closed and its staff went into hiding for fear of being arrested by government security forces.

There were no further developments, nor are any likely, in the prosecution of eight former civil war combatants who were arrested after the 2000 ransacking of the offices of the Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE) and the beating of former interim president and human rights defender Amos Sawyer and the organization's executive director, Conmany Wesseh. Both Sawyer and Wessen now reside overseas.

The Government permitted international NGOs and human rights organizations to operate in the country, and a few international organizations did so during the year. Visiting observers and local employees monitored the situation and reported their findings openly. The Government strongly criticized AI's objections to the imposition of the state of emergency in February. The Carter Center still had not received a formal invitation to return to the country by year's end.

The National Human Rights Commission remained inactive during the year. The Government did not fund it, and the Senate still did not act on the appointments of three of its five commissioners.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin, or political opinion; however, discrimination existed. There were no laws against gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, or FGM. Differences involving ethnic groups, notably the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups, continued to

contribute to serious political violence and abuses.

Women

Domestic violence against women was widespread; however, it was not addressed seriously as a problem by the Government, the courts, or the media. Several NGOs in Monrovia and Buchanan continued programs to treat abused women and girls and increase awareness of their rights.

FGM traditionally was performed on young girls in northern, western, and central ethnic groups, particularly in rural areas. Prior to the onset of the civil war in 1989, approximately 50 percent of women in rural areas between the ages of 8 and 18 were subjected to FGM. A local organization, Human Rights Watch Women and Children, launched a campaign in 2001 to eradicate FGM, but no results were reported. The Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFELL) also spoke out against FGM.

Social structures and traditional institutions, such as the secret societies that often performed FGM as an initiation rite, were undermined by the war. While many experts believed that the incidence of FGM dropped to as low as 10 percent by the end of the war, traditional societies were reestablishing themselves throughout the country, and the practice of FGM continued. The most extreme form of FGM, infibulation, was not practiced. The Government took no action against FGM during the year.

The status of women varied by region, ethnic group, and religion. Before the outbreak of the civil war, women held one-fourth of the professional and technical jobs in Monrovia. On the whole, women have not recovered from the setbacks caused by the civil war, when most schools were closed, and they were prevented from carrying out their traditional roles in the production, allocation, and sale of food.

Women married under civil law can inherit land and property; however, women married under traditional laws were considered the properties of their husbands and were not entitled to inherit from their husbands or retain custody of their children if their husbands die. The Government prohibits polygyny; however, traditional laws permit men to have more than one wife. Women's organizations, especially AFELL, continued to press for legislation on behalf of inheritance rights in traditional marriages. There continued to be few programs to help former combatants reintegrate into society, and there were none specifically to benefit former female combatants; however, several women's organizations advanced family welfare issues, helped promote political reconciliation, and assisted in rehabilitating both former female combatants and women who were victims of the civil war. The Liberian chapter of the Mano River Women's Peace Network visited neighboring countries during the year to promote regional peace and stability.

During the year, professional women's groups--including lawyers, market women, and businesswomen--remained vocal about their concerns regarding government corruption, the economy, security abuses, rape, domestic violence, and children's rights. Government officials often responded negatively to public criticism. Outspoken critics such as JPC chief Morris were harassed (see Section 4). In 2001 the Government created the Ministry for Gender and Development, whose mandate included the promotion of the wellbeing of women and girls.

Children

The Government generally was unable to provide for the education and health of children; however, it intensified the nationwide anti-polio vaccination campaign during the year. Due to the poor condition of government schools, many children, who attended school particularly in Monrovia, went to private institutions. Since many private schools still needed to be refurbished due to wartime damage, school fees remained relatively high, thereby making education unattainable for many school-age children. In both public and private schools, families of children often were asked to provide their own books, pencils, paper, and even desks. In 2001 1.05 million out of an estimated 1.7 million school-age children, less than half of whom were girls, were enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Expenditures on education were estimated at \$2.4 million (167 million Id). In 1995 the literacy rate was 53.9 percent for boys and 22.4 percent for girls.

Young persons were victimized during the civil war of the mid-1990s. An estimated 50,000 children were killed; many more were injured, orphaned, or abandoned. Approximately 100 underfunded orphanages operated in and around Monrovia; however, many orphans lived outside these institutions. The National Military Families Association of Liberia (NAMFA) tried to provide for orphaned military children; it registered hundreds of street children. These institutions did not receive any government funding, but relied on private donations. Nearly all youths witnessed terrible atrocities, and some committed atrocities themselves. Approximately 21 percent (4,306) of the combatants who were disarmed under the provisions of the Abuja Peace Accords were child soldiers under

the age of 17. Many youths remained traumatized, and some still were addicted to drugs. The number of street children in Monrovia and the number of abandoned infants increased significantly following disarmament. Although pressured by the Government to cease their programs, international NGOs and UNICEF continued retraining and rehabilitation programs for a limited number of former child fighters. These children were vulnerable to being recruited in subregional conflicts, since most had no other means of support.

The various armed militias continued to recruit forcibly underage soldiers. During the LURD offensive in May, government troops forcefully conscripted several dozen young men from the streets of Monrovia, took them to military camps where they were armed, and sent them to the battle zone. Secondary school boys were targeted for such operations in the Red Light and Duala neighborhoods of the capital. Families in rural areas claimed that their missing sons also returned after several months and reported that they had been seized and forced to fight LURD rebels. There were credible reports that the LURD engaged in similar forced recruitment tactics.

FGM was performed primarily on young girls (see Section 5, Women).

Persons with Disabilities

As a result of the civil war, a large number of persons had permanent disabilities, in addition to those disabled by accident or illness. It is illegal to discriminate against persons with disabilities; however, in practice they did not enjoy equal access to public buildings or government services. No laws mandate accessibility to public buildings or services. Persons with disabilities faced discrimination, particularly in rural areas. Babies with deformities often were abandoned. Some NGOs provided services to persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Although the Constitution bans ethnic discrimination, it also provides that only "persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent" may be citizens or own land. Many persons of Lebanese and Asian descent who were born or have lived most of their lives in the country were denied full rights as a result of this racial distinction.

The country was ethnically diverse. The population was made up of 16 indigenous ethnic groups. The indigenous ethnic groups generally spoke distinct primary languages and were concentrated regionally. No ethnic group constituted a majority of the population.

Many members of the predominantly Muslim Mandingo minority encountered hostility when they sought to return, after the end of the civil war, to their villages in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba counties. Many Mandingos were unable to reoccupy their homes, which had been taken over by squatters. Members of the Lorma, Gio, and Mano minorities generally held all Mandingos responsible for atrocities committed by the ULIMO-K faction during the civil war. The lack of competent security forces and a fully functioning judiciary in these areas prevented many Mandingos from seeking redress. Mandingo citizens faced growing discrimination, arbitrary arrests, and violence based on their ethnicity (see Section 1.a.); many ethnic Mandingos sought refuge in Guinea after the Government increased arrests following the detention of journalist Hassan Bility (see Section 1.d.).

The LURD was a coalition of ethnic Mandingos and Krahns, although many ethnic Lorma were members of the rebel group as well. The continuing violence in Lofa County exacerbated ethnic tensions between the Mandingos and the Lormas (see Section 1.a.).

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides workers, except members of the military and police, the right to associate in trade unions, and workers were allowed to join unions in practice. The Constitution also provides that unions are prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity. However, government interference in union activities, especially union elections and leaderships struggles, was common both before and during the civil war.

Although most economic activity was interrupted by the war, unions proliferated. There were approximately 30 functioning unions organized loosely under two umbrella groups, the Liberian Federation of Labor Unions (LFLU) and the Congress of Liberian Trade Unions (CLTU), with the common objective of protecting the rights of their 60,000 members, who largely were unemployed. The actual power that the unions exercised was extremely limited. Since the country's work force largely was illiterate, economic activities beyond the subsistence level were

very limited, and the labor laws tended to favor management.

During the year, the Government strictly enforced the union registration requirements that fell into disuse during the war. Applicants needed to register at two different ministries, and processing time was arbitrary, taking only a few days for some and never being issued for others.

Labor unions traditionally have been affiliated with international labor groups such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

With the exception of civil servants, workers (including employees of public corporations and autonomous agencies) have the right to organize and bargain collectively. In the past, agreements were negotiated freely between workers and their employers without government interference; however, these rights largely were unused during the year because of the lack of economic activity.

Labor laws provide for the right to strike. The laws were nullified by a People's Redemption Council decree in 1984 that outlawed strikes, but that decree has not been enforced for years. Due to the destruction of the economy and the estimated 85 percent unemployment rate, strikes were infrequent; however, in September teachers in the greater Monrovia school system struck and refused to begin the fall term without some salary payment, which was 9 months in arrears. In October the Minister of Education announced that 1 month's salary and a bag of rice would be paid to teachers so that classes could begin. The teachers accepted the offer and returned to work after receiving the promise that all back wages would be paid in January 2003.

On June 10, workers at the Oriental Timber Company (OTC) held the company's legal and labor consultants hostage at a logging camp in River Cess County. The workers complained that they had been fired after they had refused to eat stale lunch food served by the company. The OTC resolved the crisis when it reinstated the workers.

There were no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, this prohibition was ignored widely in many parts of the country. In some rural areas, farmers were pressured into providing free labor on "community projects" that often benefited only local leaders. There were allegations that large logging companies in the southeast forcibly recruited workers. There also were reports that local officials forced convicts to work for them. There were reports during the year that local government officials forced persons to work without compensation on President Taylor's farm. During the year, AFL soldiers forced the manager of an agricultural project to do menial labor for 3 weeks (see Section 1.c.).

There were reports that commanders of security forces forced persons to dig for diamonds and gold in the west and southeast part of the country.

Some former combatants, including some in the security forces, were accused of forcing children to work in the mining industry. Human rights groups reported instances of forced child labor in some rural areas, particularly in artisanal diamond mining. A child rights advocacy group's report on child labor in the southeastern counties and that of another prominent human rights group contradicted a government report, which concluded that there was no conclusive evidence of forced child labor. Subsequently legislators from three counties sued the child rights advocacy group for defaming the counties' reputations. At year's end, the case still was pending.

There also were reports that LURD rebels forced civilians into service as porters for LURD ammunition and supplies in Lofa and Gbarpolu Counties.

LURD rebels also forcibly conscripted children to fight as child soldiers (see Section 5).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16 during school hours in the wage sector, but enforcement was lax. The Ministry of Labor frequently lacked the resources to carry out its mandate. In May it dispatched a team to investigate reported abuses at the OTC in Buchanan; however, the team did not report its

findings during the year. Throughout rural areas, particularly where there were no schools, small children continued to assist their parents as vendors in local markets or on the streets, to take care of younger brothers and sisters, and to work on family subsistence farms.

On June 4, President Taylor ratified ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

There were reports that forced and bonded labor by children occurred (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law provides for a minimum wage, paid leave, severance benefits, and safety standards, but enforcement was targeted solely against profitable firms that generally observed these standards. Due to the country's continued economic problems, most citizens were forced to accept any work they could find regardless of wages or working conditions. The Ministry of Labor claimed it lacked the resources to monitor compliance with labor laws.

The law requires a minimum wage of approximately \$0.25 (10 ld) per hour not exceeding 8 hours per day, excluding benefits, for unskilled laborers. The law requires that agricultural workers be paid \$1.00 (60 ld) for an 8-hour day, excluding benefits. Skilled labor has no minimum fixed wage, but industrial workers usually received three or four times the wage paid to agricultural workers. The highly competitive minimum wage jobs provided a minimal standard of living for a worker and family; however, there were very few such jobs. Families dependent on minimum wage incomes also engaged in subsistence farming, small-scale marketing, petty extortion, and begging. By October the Government owed civil servants 10 months of salary arrears. Except for payment of 1 month's salary, no other provisions were undertaken to pay the arrears during the year.

The law provides for a 48-hour, 6-day regular workweek with a 30-minute rest period per 5 hours of work. The 6-day workweek may extend to 56 hours for service occupations and to 72 hours for miners, with overtime pay beyond 48 hours.

There were government-established health and safety standards, enforced theoretically by the Ministry of Labor. Even under the law, workers did not have a specific right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without risking loss of employment.

The law protects legal, but not illegal, foreign workers.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons, and there were reports that persons were trafficked within the country. There were reports of forced labor, including by children, and the recruitment of child soldiers (see Sections 5 and 6.c.).